

GENERAL MAGRUDER'S STORY OF BIG BETHEL

Official Reports of First Land Battle of Civil War, on Whose Blood Stained Field Granite Shaft Was Unveiled Yesterday.

Headquarters, Camp Bethel,
Bethel Church, June 10th, 1861.

The enemy, thirty-five hundred strong, attacked us at our post, and after a very animated conflict of two hours and a half was repulsed at all points and totally routed. Four companies of cavalry are now in hot pursuit toward Newport News. I cannot speak too highly of the devotion of our troops, all of whom did their duty nobly; and whilst it might appear invidious to speak particularly of any regiment or corps where all behaved so well, I am compelled to express my great appreciation of the skill and gallantry of Major Randolph and his howitzer battery, and Colonel Hill, the officers and men of the North Carolina regiment. As an instance of the latter I will merely mention that a gun under the gallant Captain Brown, of the howitzer battery, having been rendered unfit for service by the breaking of a priming wire in the vent, and not being defended by infantry, from the small number we had at our command, Captain Brown threw it over a precipice, and the work was occupied for a moment by the enemy.

Captain Bridgers, of the North Carolina regiment, in the most gallant manner, retook it and held it until Captain Brown had replaced and put in position another piece, and then defended it with his infantry in the most gallant manner. Colonel Hill's judicious and determined action was worthy of his ancient glory and Colonel Stuart, Major Montague, Major Cary, Captains Walker and Atkinson, with every officer and every man under their command, did good service in the front of the fight.

The able and efficient manner in which Captains Douthatt, Phillips and Jones, of the cavalry, performed the duties of infantry, and Lieutenant Chisman, of the Wythe Rifles, in protecting the rear of the position, is deserving of high commendation.

There were many acts of personal gallantry—some under my own observation, and others which were reported to me—that I will take occasion to mention in a subsequent communication. At present I expect another attack, and have no time. I am extremely indebted to the two brothers, Robert H. and William R. Vaughn, my acting commissary and quartermaster, for the most gallant and efficient services, no less than to my youthful aids, Mr. George A. Magruder, Jr., and Hugh Stannard, who were always in the front of the fight, and upon whom I request the government to bestow commissions, as they are desirous of entering the regular service.

In the hurry of this communication I may have omitted to mention many gallant men.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
J. BANKHEAD MAGRUDER,
Colonel Commanding.

To Colonel R. S. Garnett.

Number of killed and wounded on our side—One killed and seven wounded. Enemy—Ten dead bodies found, as reported to me, and, perhaps, fifty wounded. Three prisoners. Our force, all told, about 1,200 men. Enemy—3,500 with 18- and 24-pounder guns besides light guns.
J. B. M.

Report of Col. (afterward Gen.) D. H. Hill.

First North Carolina Infantry,
Yorktown, June 12th, 1861.

In obedience to orders from the colonel commanding, I marched on the 6th inst., with my regiment and four pieces of Major Randolph's battery, from Yorktown, on the Hampton Road, to Bethel Church, nine miles from Hampton. We reached there after dark on a wet night, and slept without tents. Early on the morning of the



MAYOR THORNTON F. JONES, who made the address of welcome.

7th I made a reconnaissance of the ground, preparatory to fortifying.

I found a branch of Back River on our front, and encircling our right flank. On our left was a dense and almost impassable wood, except about one hundred and fifty yards of old field. The breadth of the road, a thick wood and narrow, cultivated field covered our rear. The nature of the ground determined me to make an inclosed work, and I had the invaluable aid of Lieutenant Colonel Lee, of my regiment, in its plan and construction. Our position had the inherent defect of being commanded by an immense field immediately in front of it, upon which the masses of the enemy might be readily deployed. Presuming that an attempt would be made to carry the bridge across the stream, a battery was made for its especial protection, and Major Randolph placed his guns so as to sweep all the approaches to it.

The occupation of two commanding eminences beyond the creek and on our right would have greatly strengthened our position, but our force was too weak to admit of the occupation of more than one of them. A battery was laid out on it for one of Randolph's howitzers. We had only twenty-five spades, six axes and three picks, but these were busily plied all day and night of the 7th and all day of the 8th. On the afternoon of the 8th I learned that a marauding party of the enemy was within a few miles of us. I called for a party of thirty-four men to drive them back. Lieutenant Roberts, of Company F, of my regiment, promptly responded, and in five minutes his command was en route.

I detached Major Randolph with one howitzer to join them, and Lieutenant Colonel Lee, First Regiment North Carolina Volunteers, requested and was granted permission to take command of the whole. After a march of five miles they came across the marauders, busy over the spoils of a plundered house. A shell soon put the plunderers to flight, and they were chased over New Market bridge, where our little force was halted, in consequence of the presence of a considerable body situate on the other side.

Lieutenant Colonel Lee brought in one prisoner. How many of the enemy were killed and wounded is not known. None of our command was hurt. Soon after Lieutenant Colonel Lee left a citizen came dashing in with the information that seventy-five marauders were on the Back River Road.

I called for Captain McDowell's company (E), of the First Regiment of North Carolina Volunteers, and in three minutes it was in hot pursuit. Lieutenant West, of the Howitzer battalion, with one piece, was detached to join them, and Major Lane, of my regiment, volunteered, dispersed and chased the wretches over the New Market bridge, this being the second race on the same day over the New Market course, in both of which the Yankees reached the goal first. Major Lane brought in one prisoner. Reliable citizens reported that two cart loads and one buggy load of wounded were taken to Hampton.

We had not a single man killed or wounded. Colonel Magruder came up that evening and assumed command.

On Sunday, the 9th, a fresh supply of tools enabled us to put more men to work, and, when not engaged in religious duties, the men worked vigorously on the trenchments. We were aroused at three o'clock on Monday morning for a general advance upon the enemy, and marched three and a half miles, when we learned that the foe, in large force, was within a few hundred yards of us. We fell back hastily upon our trenchments, and awaited the arrival of our invaders. Lieutenant Colonel Stuart, of the Third Virginia Regiment, having come with some one hundred and eighty men, was stationed on the hill on the extreme right, beyond the creek, and Company G of my regiment was also thrown over the stream to protect the howitzer under Captain Brown.

Captain Bridgers, of Company A, First North Carolina Regiment, took post in the dense wood beyond and to the left of the road. Major Montague, with three companies of his battalion, was ordered up from the rear, and took post on our right, beginning at the church and extending along the entire front on that side.

This fine body of men and the gallant command of Lieutenant Colonel Stuart worked with great rapidity, and in an hour had constructed temporary shelters against the enemy's fire.

Just at 9 o'clock a. m. the heavy columns of the enemy were seen approaching rapidly and in good order, but when Randolph opened on them at 9:15 their organization was completely broken up. The enemy promptly replied with his artillery, firing briskly but wildly. He made an attempt at deployment on our right of the road, under cover of some houses and paling. He was, however, very promptly driven back by our artillery, a Virginia company—the Life Guards—and Companies B and G of my regiment. The enemy attempted no development within musketry range during the day, except under cover of woods, fences or paling.

Under cover of trees he moved a strong column to an old ford, some three-quarters of a mile below, where I had placed a picket of some forty men. Colonel Magruder sent Captain Werth's company, of Montague's command, with one howitzer, under Sergeant

Crane, to drive back this column, which was done by a single shot from the howitzer.

Before this a priming wire had been broken in the vent of the howitzer commanded by Captain Brown, and rendered it useless.

A force estimated at 1,500 was now attempting to outflank us and get in the rear of Lieutenant Colonel Stuart's small command. He was accordingly directed to fall back, and the whole of our advanced troops were withdrawn. At this critical moment I directed Lieutenant Colonel Lee to call Captain Bridgers out of the swamp, and ordered him to reoccupy the nearest advanced work, and I ordered Captain Ross, company C, First Regiment, North Carolina Volunteers, to the support of Lieutenant Colonel Stuart.

These two captains, with their companies, crossed over to Randolph's battery, under a very heavy fire, in a most gallant manner. As Lieutenant Colonel Stuart had withdrawn, Captain Ross was detained at the church, near Randolph's battery. Captain Bridgers, however, crossed over and drove the zonaves out of the advanced howitzer battery, and reoccupied it.

It is impossible to overestimate this service. It decided the action in our favor.

In obedience to orders from Colonel Magruder, Lieutenant Colonel Stuart marched back, and in spite of the presence of a foe ten times his superior in number resumed in the most heroic manner, possession of his trenchments.

A fresh howitzer was carried across and placed in the battery, and Captain Avery, of Company G, was directed to defend it at all hazards. We were now secure as at the beginning of the fight, and as yet had no man killed. The enemy, finding himself foiled on our right flank, next made his final demonstration on our left. A strong column, supposed to consist of volunteers from different regiments, and under command of Captain Winthrop, aid-de-camp to General Butler, crossed over the creek and appeared at the angle on our left. Those in advance had put on our distinctive badge of a white band around the cap, and they cried out repeatedly, "Don't fire." This ruse was practiced to enable the whole column to get over the creek and form in good order. They now began to cheer most lustily, thinking that our work was open at the gorge, and that they could get in by a sudden rush. Companies B and C, however, dispelled the illusion by a cool, deliberate and well-directed fire. Colonel Magruder sent over portions of Companies G, C and H of my regiment to our support; and now began as cool firing on our side as was ever witnessed.

The three field officers of the regiment were present, and but few shots were fired without their permission, the men repeatedly saying, "May I fire?" "I think I can bring him." They were all in high glee, and seemed to enjoy it as much as boys do rabbit shooting. Captain Winthrop, while most gallantly urging on his men, was shot through the heart, when all rushed back with the utmost precipitation.

So far as my observation extended, he was the only one of the enemy who exhibited even an approximation to courage during the whole day.

The fight at the angle lasted but twenty minutes. It completely discouraged the enemy, and he made no further effort at assault. The house in front, which had served as a hiding place for the enemy, was now fired by a shell from a howitzer, and the outhouses and palings were soon in a blaze. As all shelter was now taken from him, the enemy called in his troops and started back to Hampton. As he had left sharpshooters behind him in the woods on our left, the dragoons could not advance until Captain Hoke, of Company K, first North Carolina Volunteers, had thoroughly explored them.

As soon as he gave the assurance of the road being clear Captain Douthatt, with some one hundred dragoons, in compliance with Colonel Magruder's orders, pursued. The enemy in his haste threw away hundreds of canteens, haversacks, overcoats, etc., even the dead were thrown out of the wagons. The pursuit soon became a chase, and for the third time the enemy won the race over the New Market course.

The bridge was torn up behind him, and our dragoons returned to camp. There were not quite 800 of my regiment engaged in the fight, and not one-half of these drew trigger during the day.

All remained manfully at the post assigned to them, and not a man in the regiment behaved badly. The companies not engaged were as much exposed, and rendered equal service with those participating in the fight. They deserve equally the thanks of the country. In fact, it is the most trying ordeal to which soldiers can be subjected, to receive a fire which their orders forbid them to return. Had a single company left its post our works would have been exposed; and the constancy and discipline of the unengaged companies cannot be too highly commended.

A detachment of fifteen cadets from the North Carolina Military

Continued on Second Page.



MISS MAGGIE TABB, OF YORK COUNTY.

Representative of the Virginia Confederate Veterans and kindred organization, and who assisted in unveiling the monument.



MISS FANNIE KYLE, OF FAYETTEVILLE, N. C.

Representative of the North Carolina Confederate Veterans and who assisted in unveiling the monument.